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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a community involvement approach to advanced second language teaching and exemplifies the practical outcomes of the arguments in the paper "Education for Pluralism - The Changing Role of Language Teaching in Australia". "Community involvement" plays an integral and intergrating role and takes three forms, "extramural," formal and informal activities. Language development occurs through a self-directed grammar program, the teaching of language functions, discourse and cohesion, relevant registers, and practical use of the four macroskills. Attitudinal development is catered for through general culture learning; Social Studies; language games, reading and discussion focusing on attitudinal issues; and, especially, through community involvement. All these activities also involve major components that promote language development through meaningful use of the language. The learning strategies that are involved are outlined and the methods used to evaluate the program are referred to. The courses that utilize this approach are being developed at the Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education, Brisbane, Australia. (Author)

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RESEARCH PROJECT

LEARNING THROUGH USE
A PROJECTED COMMUNITY-BASED COURSE FOR TERTIARY STUDENTS OF FRENCH.

D.E. INGRAM

MOUNT GRAVATT COLLEGE OF ADVANCED EDUCATION

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LEARNING THROUGH USE

A PROJECTED COMMUNITY-BASED COURSE FOR TERTIARY STUDENTS OF FRENCH.

D.E.INGRAM

Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education

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I. RATIONALE:

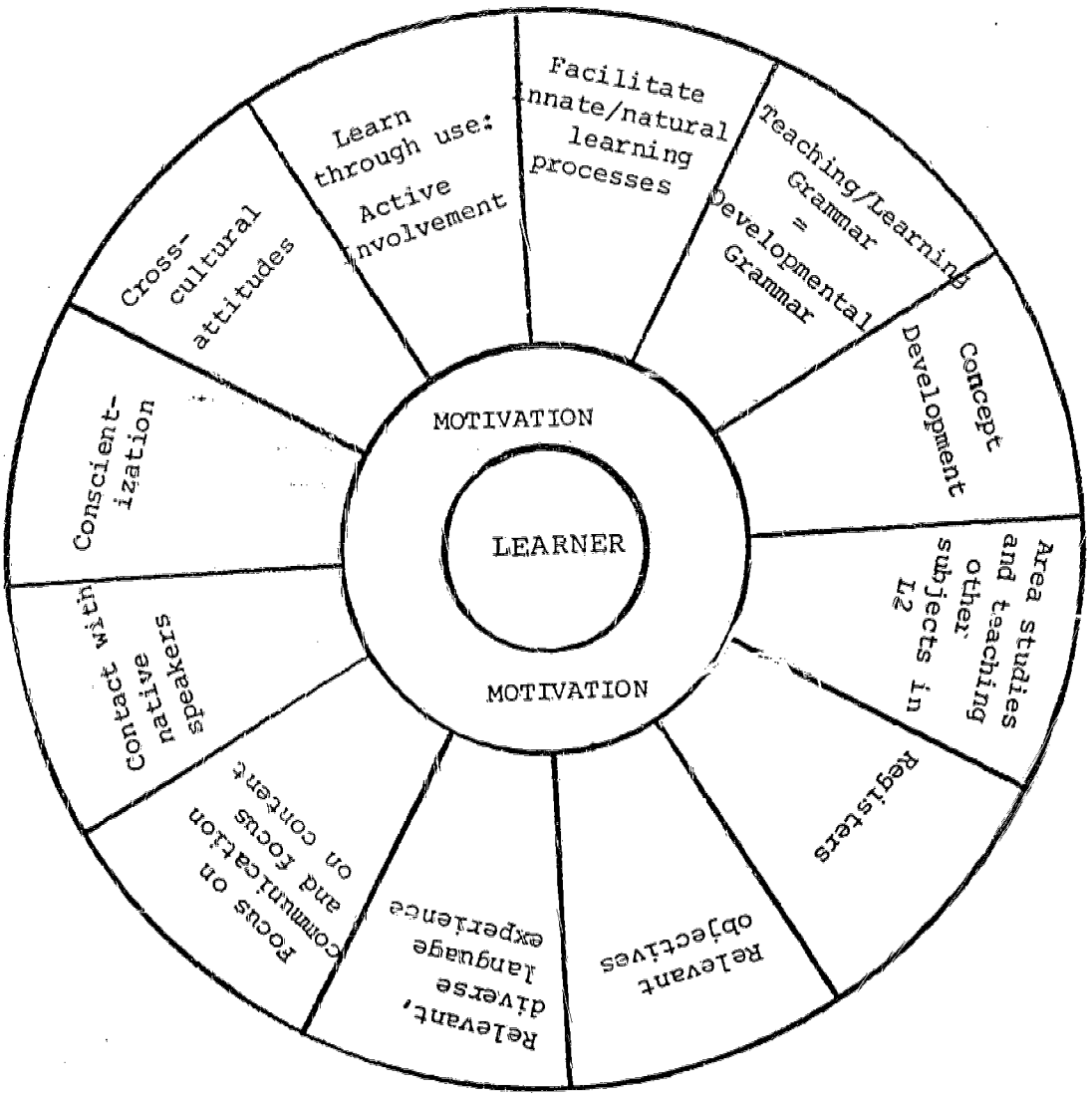
The general philosophy underlying this course is that expressed in the paper "Education for Pluralism - the Changing Role of Language Teaching in Australia" (Ingram 1976a) and will not be elaborated upon here. In summary, the reasons include:

1. The need to develop favourable cross-cultural attitudes.
2. The need, therefore, to ensure that interaction between cultural groups takes place in informal as well as formal situations.
3. The need to make the learner conscious of the nature of society, of his attitudes, of society's attitudes, and of his ability to change them.
4. The need to rapidly develop practical language proficiency and communicative competence.
5. The fact that language is best learned through purposeful use.
6. The need to contextualize language practice.
7. The desirability of diversifying and broadening the cultural basis of L2 teaching.
8. The need to integrate the L2 and the model of the world (or conceptual structure).
9. The desirability of teaching skills and language functions rather than just elements of the language.
10. The need to individualize grammatical learning to meet each individual's needs and to match the course to his point in the developmental schedule.
11. The need to ensure students have available structures, lexis and functions for use in contacting native speakers

in the pluralist society.

12. The need to provide learning activities, including reading materials, relevant to the learner's interests.

These can be summarized diagrammatically thus:



II. COURSE COMPONENTS:

II.1 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

"Community involvement" plays an integral and integrating role in this approach to language teaching. It takes several forms but its justification comes from two basic needs: first, to provide purposeful and meaningful situations for language use and, second, to encourage interaction by the students with native speakers in the community as a major means of encouraging greater intercultural understanding and acceptance. The activities will be of three types: "extramural", formal and informal.

II.1.1 Extramural Activities: By "extramural" activities are intended activities that extend the practice of the language beyond the classroom but in activities closely related to other course components. These might include Social Studies field trips and the use of Radio Australia news broadcasts in French. That is, as well as supporting formal class work, these activities enable the student to see his region and nation through French, to re-think his experience in terms of French, to use the language purposefully, and to acquire facility in lexis and functions relevant to some of the other "community involvement" activities.

II.1.2 Formal Activities: These are included, despite their danger of becoming yet another anthropological look at French specimens, for three reasons. First, it is considered desirable to provide activities which ensure contact will occur and which, because of the formal course requirements, help to overcome student apathy, embarrassment, and the competing demands of other

subjects. Secondly, they provide valuable reasons for practising written skills in letter-writing to arrange appointments and in reporting on the investigations. Thirdly, activities can be chosen to promote culture learning as, for example, the student investigates the native speaker's attitudes to education in France and Australia or investigates the operation of a French "institution" such as a restaurant, consulate, or bank. The use of the materials from the "Orléans" sociolinguistic project of the University of Essex can also provide investigative activities in this category.

II.1.3 Informal Activities: These could be considered to embody the most desirable and ultimate objectives of the course as the student engages in informal social interaction with native speakers. This may take many forms and may arise from initiatives taken during the formal interviews or may occur in soirées, excursions, camps etc. arranged by the institution. A useful activity relating closely to the "extramural" activities might include the students' showing visitors (sailors, migrants, etc.) around the city.

II.2 LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

This is a vital part of the course and, from the teacher's point of view, is one of the major goals. The activities chosen have been selected to enable much language learning to occur through the purposeful use of the language, an approach that accords with recent insights into language acquisition. However, specific attention to some aspects of the language is considered desirable.

II.2.1 Structure and Vocabulary: "Remedial" courses which merely aim at "drilling out errors" seem to be futile. Furthermore, if learners follow a fixed schedule of L2 acquisition (either individual or universal), as developmental studies seem to show, then it would seem desirable that students be able to focus on those structures or rules most suitable for them. This leads to an individualized and largely self-directed grammar programme which responds especially to needs each individual feels in the course of the community involvement activities. Thus, there is feedback from the active language use components of the course to the more formal learning of grammar and lexis.

II.2.2 Functions: A functional approach to language learning has been shown to be more successful than more traditional approaches (cf. Ingram 1976). Functions relevant to the students' own needs will be focussed on, particularly study needs, community involvement needs, and travel needs. Taped materials (e.g. from the "Orléans" project), games, and role play will provide opportunities to study and practise these functions.

II.2.3 Discourse and Cohesion: The present writer's own studies of matriculation French (Ph.D. thesis, forthcoming) as well as studies appearing elsewhere in applied linguistics (cf. Ingram 1976) have shown the need for particular attention to developing facility in the features of discourse and cohesion.

II.2.4 Registers: In this course, three factors determine the choice of registers to be taught: the need for language for everyday communication in Australia (i.e. in the informal community involvement activities), the need for certain specific registers depending on

the students' own choice of topics to pursue in the formal community involvement activities, the nature of the students' professional interests (viz. education), and the inclusion of Social Studies in the course. It is the students' professional interests which determine, for example, the choice of a text on L2 teaching for reading and discussion instead of a literary text.

II.2.5 The Four Macroskills: All four macroskills (i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing) will be developed. The community involvement activities clearly give much real practice in all four skills. In addition, listening receives particular attention through the classes in Social Studies, the use of Radio Australia news bulletins, as well as films and other traditional materials. Fluent "extensive" reading is developed through the use of texts at the 3,000 word level where the emphasis is on speed rather than detailed comprehension. Texts on education and on cross-cultural attitudes as well as journalistic material providing cultural background are used for more intensive reading and to promote discussion and "conversation" on topics relevant to the students.

II.2.6 Linguistics: At an advanced level, some introduction to linguistics will be given in order to heighten student sensitivity to language structure and promote language learning (cf.Carroll 1971, Angoff and Sharon 1970).

II.3 ATTITUDINAL DEVELOPMENT

The development of favourable cross-cultural attitudes is a major goal of this course. It is achieved through developing an

understanding of the other culture, through the conscientization process, and through interaction with native speakers.

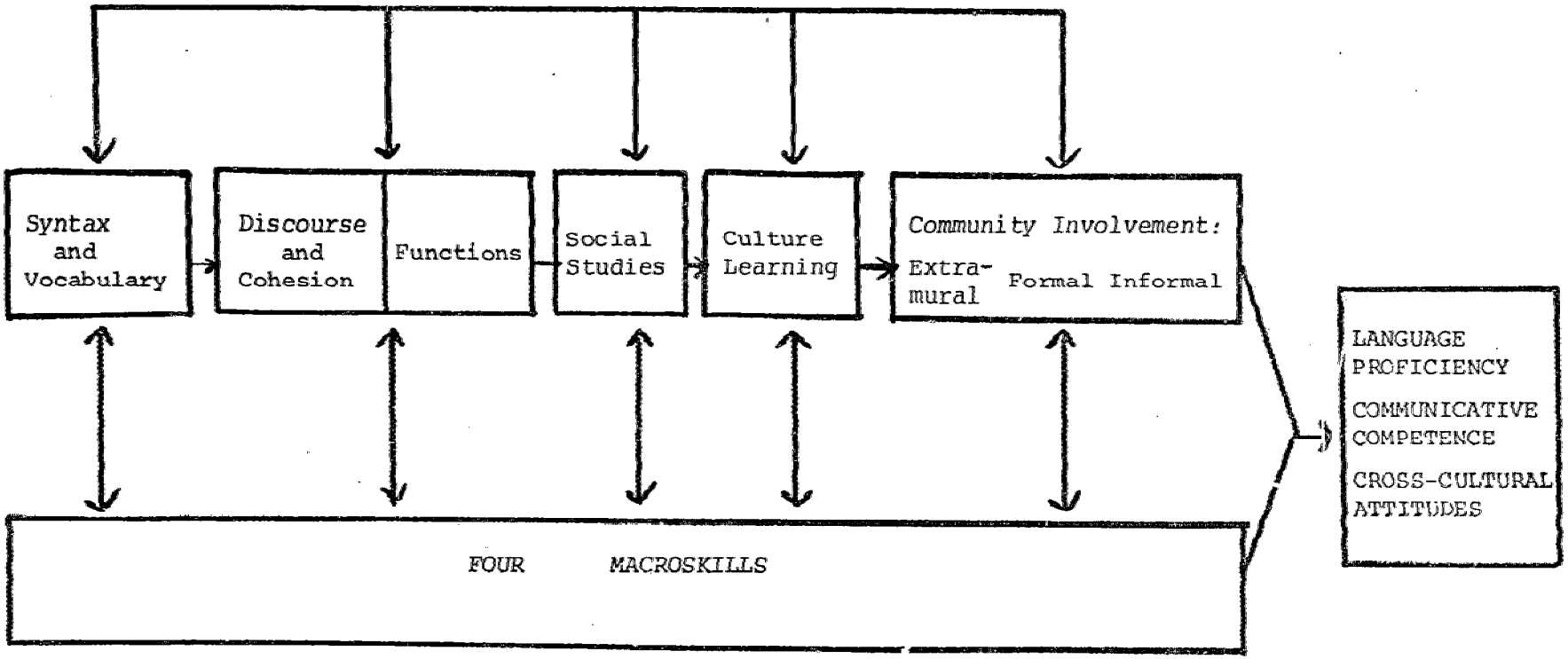
II.3.1 General Culture Learning: Traditional activities play a part in this with particular focus on the personal experience of lecturers and others participating in the course. Some attention will be given to the historical and present influence and activities of the French in Australia. In addition, the Social Studies component plays a major part by broadening the normal cultural basis of a language course into something more nearly approximating "Area Studies", enabling links to be made to the local region and community, providing one means for the re-integration of the language with the learner's conceptual structure, and, by using the language in learning another subject, ensuring that the language becomes a means to the achievement of some other end.

II.3.2 Conscientization: The paper "Education for Pluralism" has emphasized the importance of the conscientization process in attitudinal development. In particular, it requires the student's being made aware of his own attitudes, of the effect of dominating societies on persons of other cultures, and of the individual's ability to modify his own and others' attitudes. For this reason, reading material relevant to issues of prejudice and attitude are chosen. Games such as the Oxfam games (in French) are used because they make participants acutely conscious of the effects of economic systems, nations and individuals on other people, because they are able to provoke much relevant discussion (and hence language use), and because they permit certain functions to be practised in realistic situations.

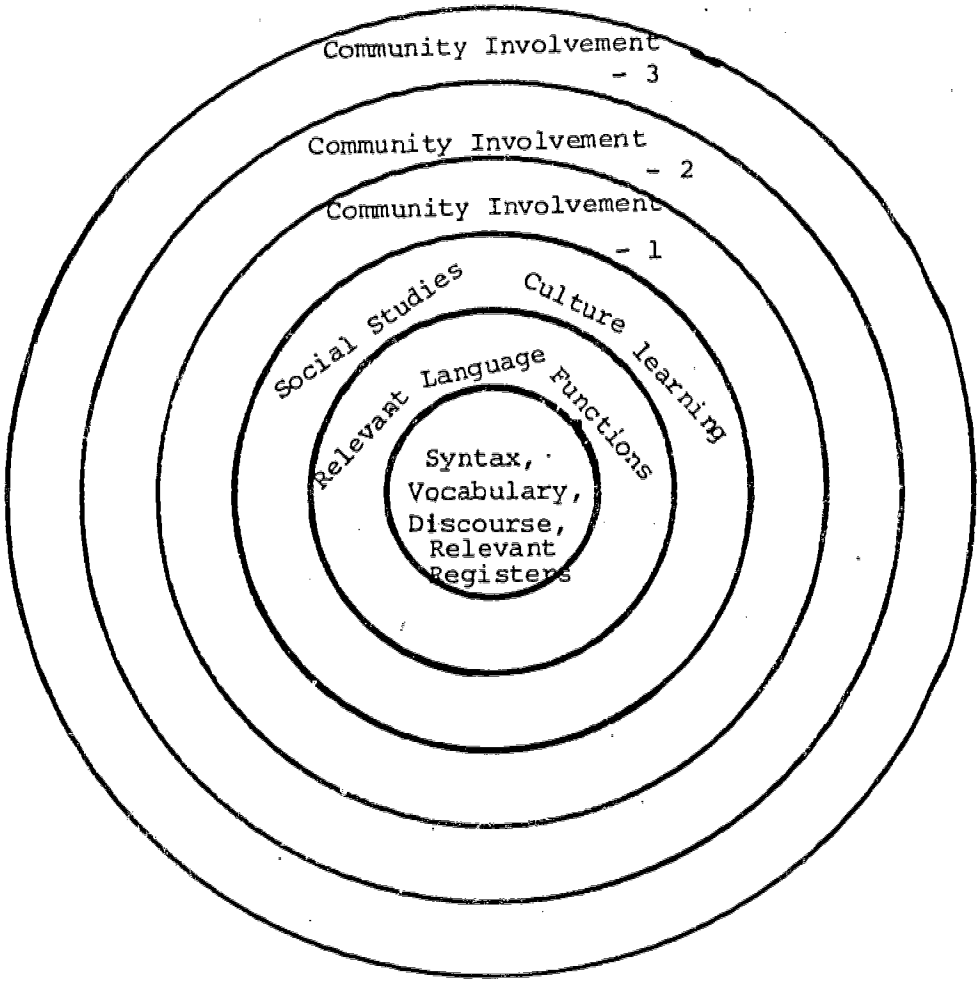
II.3.3 Community Involvement: Interaction with native speakers of the types already discussed clearly has an important part to play in attitudinal development for reasons discussed in the paper "Education for Pluralism".

II.4 COURSE COMPONENTS IN SUMMARY

The course components can be shown diagrammatically as follows:


Syntax and Vocabulary
Discourse and Cohesion
Functions
Social Studies
Culture Learning
Community Involvement:
Extra-mural
Formal
Informal
FOUR MACROSKILLS
LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE
CROSS-CULTURAL ATTITUDES

The extension from formal learning to community involvement can be illustrated in the following manner:



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - 1. "Extramural":

Look at own region and nation: field trips, Radio Australia, etc.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - 2. Formal:

Interviews and Investigations.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - 3. Informal:

Social interaction, guiding visitors, baby-sitting, etc.

III. LEARNING STRATEGIES:

These are implicit in what has preceded. In particular, the course endeavours to permit the operation of natural and individual learning styles and, as in natural language learning, to enable learning to occur through purposeful use of the language to achieve ends beyond the language itself and relevant to the learners. Such purposeful use occurs in community involvement activities, Social Studies, reading for information and attitude development, listening to news and other broadcasts, and language games. Listening has been shown (e.g. Carroll 1973) to be a learning activity of particular value and is catered for here by the community involvement activities, the Orléans materials, Radio Australia broadcasts (whose comprehension is facilitated by their known cultural basis), and by traditional activities such as films. Grammatical study emanates from the feedback link from use and may include both formal rule study and language laboratory drills. Role play and simulation activities (sometimes incorporated in language games) are used to practise specific functions. Some formal discussion (e.g. of functions, discourse, register characteristics, grammar and culture) may occur as needed but must be followed up with meaningful practice including the students' initiating of language.

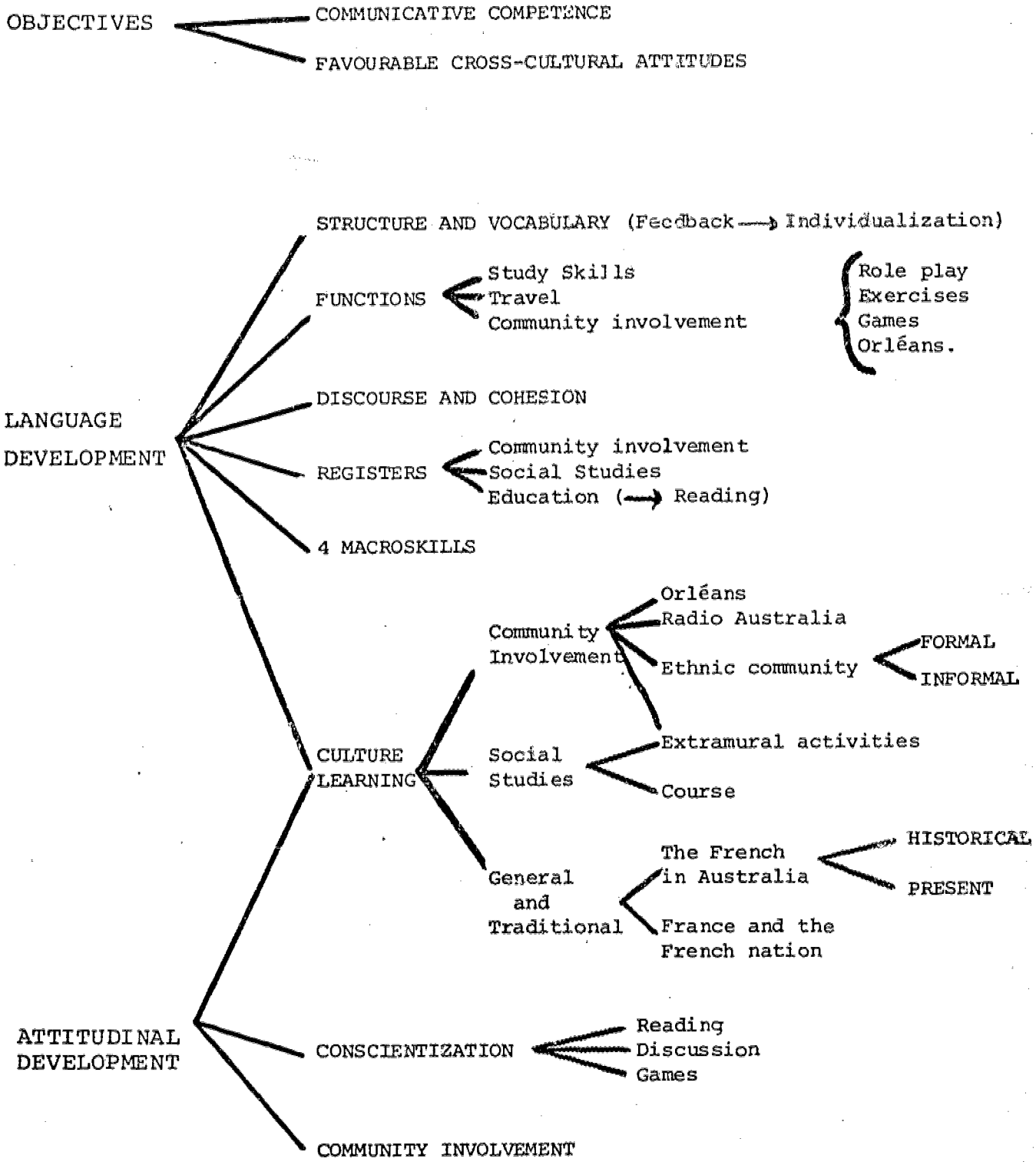
IV. EVALUATION:

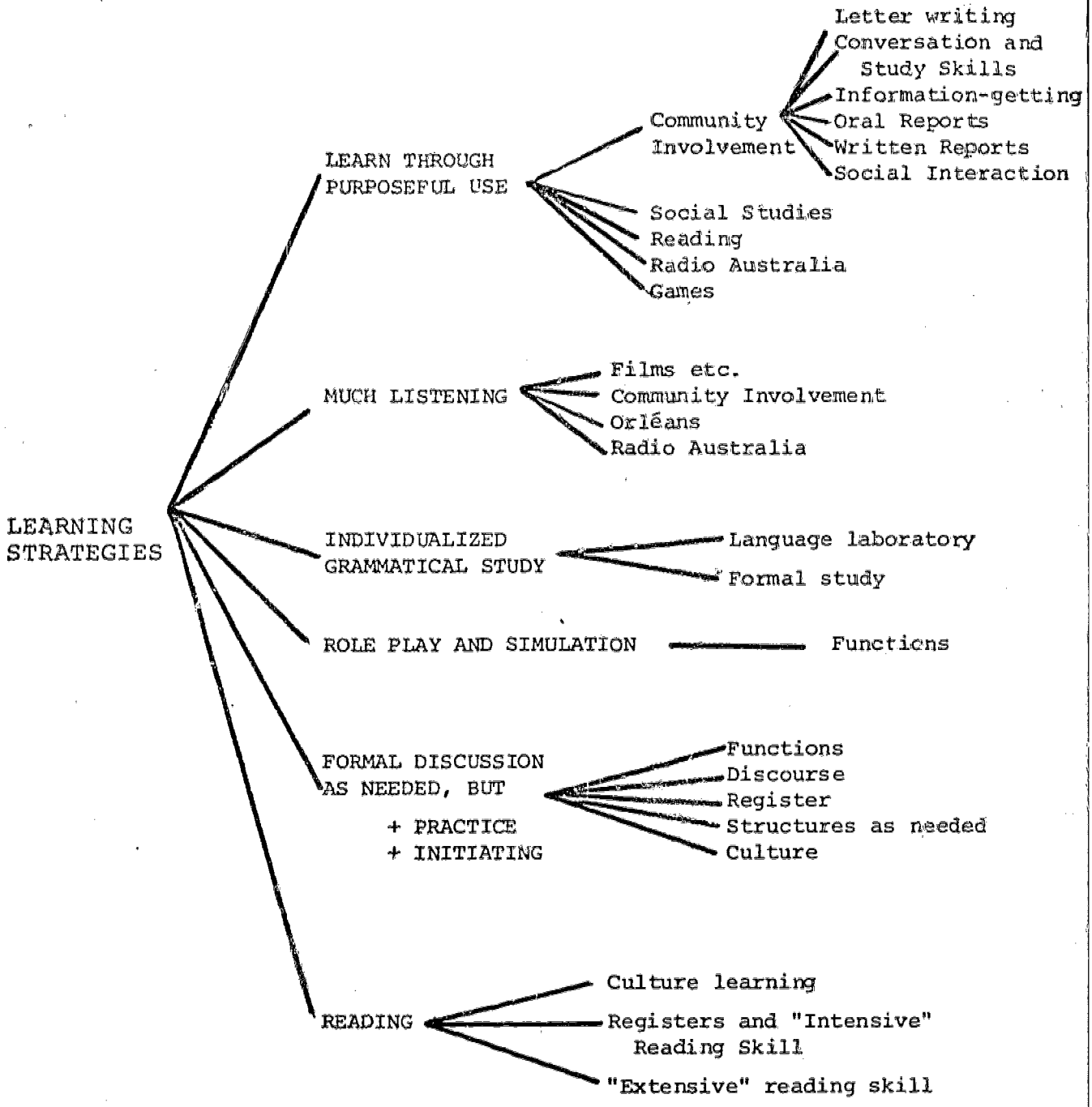
Evaluation of the students will be by continuous assessment, by the reports they make on the formal community involvement activities, by "project" work in Social Studies, and by the use of standardized tests. The course will be evaluated by descriptive methods supported statistically by some use of attitude and proficiency tests, though the value of statistical evaluation of teaching programmes must now be considered suspect (cf. Spolsky 1975 and Carroll 1963).

V. CONCLUSION:

This course will be offered at Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education in 1977 to a First Year French class (i.e. students who enter the College after five years of High School study). In a modified form, it is being offered to a Third Year group in Semester Two, 1976, and, despite some difficulties, is proving more popular than the traditional grammar-translation and drill-based courses previously offered. It is still too early to estimate its effects on language proficiency but the community involvement activities have already brought more initiating and purposeful language use than do most traditional classroom-bound courses. Once their initial fear of contact with native speakers has been overcome, the students have shown considerable willingness to converse and they participate more readily than had been expected even in classroom sessions. Already the formal community involvement activities have led to informal social activities where natural friendships can develop.

In summary, the content of the course can be illustrated as follows:


OBJECTIVES
COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE
FAVOURABLE CROSS-CULTURAL ATTITUDES
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT
STRUCTURE AND VOCABULARY (Feedback → Individualization)
FUNCTIONS
Study Skills
Travel
Community involvement
Role play
Exercises
Games
Orléans.
DISCOURSE AND COHESION
REGISTERS
Community involvement
Social Studies
Education (→ Reading)
4 MACROSKILLS
CULTURE LEARNING
Community Involvement
Orléans
Radio Australia
Ethnic community
FORMAL
INFORMAL
Social Studies
Extramural activities
Course
General and Traditional
The French in Australia
HISTORICAL
PRESENT
France and the French nation
ATTITUDINAL DEVELOPMENT
CONSCIENTIZATION
Reading
Discussion
Games
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT


LEARNING STRATEGIES
LEARN THROUGH PURPOSEFUL USE
Community Involvement
Letter writing
Conversation and Study Skills
Information-getting
Oral Reports
Written Reports
Social Interaction
Social Studies
Reading
Radio Australia
Games
MUCH LISTENING
Films etc.
Community Involvement
Orléans
Radio Australia
INDIVIDUALIZED GRAMMATICAL STUDY
Language laboratory
Formal study
ROLE PLAY AND SIMULATION
Functions
FORMAL DISCUSSION AS NEEDED, BUT
+ PRACTICE
+ INITIATING
Functions
Discourse
Register
Structures as needed
Culture
READING
Culture learning
Registers and "Intensive" Reading Skill
"Extensive" reading skill

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